



# **GUIDANCE FOR DEVELOPING A BATTLEFIELD PRESERVATION PLAN**

National Park Service  
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## **Introduction**

In 1988, a privately owned 540-acre tract on the Manassas battlefield adjacent to the Manassas National Battlefield Park in Virginia was threatened by the development of a large shopping mall. Congress halted the development by a legislative taking of the property. Congress, and the American people, subsequently paid more than \$100 million for the site. Like Manassas, hundreds of other battlefields sites located in rural America and once thought to be beyond the reach of suburban sprawl, have come under threat from development since the late 1980s.

In response to this growing problem, the Department of the Interior launched the American Battlefield Protection Program (ABPP), a partnership initiative managed by the National Park Service. Recognizing that Federal budget constraints preclude future "Manassas-style" approaches to battlefield preservation involving divisive, last-minute intervention and major Federal outlays for land acquisition, the goal of the program is to craft alternative methods of achieving battlefield preservation. The ABPP works to involve government, the private sector, and non-profit organizations in partnerships that identify endangered battlefields and seek tools to save them. Through partnerships, the ABPP encourages local stewardship and support for battlefields.

A key element in establishing partnerships is planning. Early planning involving all interested parties helps avert preservation emergencies like those at Manassas. By fostering agreement on the value and goals of battlefield preservation before potentially destructive actions have been proposed, good preservation planning minimizes controversy, delays, and expensive land acquisition.

This document is intended to assist local groups, site managers, and others interested in planning for the preservation of historic battlefields in their communities. Although many battlefields are nationally significant because the events that took place there had nationwide impacts, their fate is often determined at the local level. While assistance in preserving these sites may be available from the Federal or State governments or from a national non-profit organization, ultimately the decision to preserve or alter a site remains in the hands of local landowners and citizens. This is particularly true if the battlefield is exclusively in private ownership, as were almost half of the 384 Civil War battlefields studied by the Congressionally-chartered Civil War Sites Advisory Commission in 1992 and 1993. Even when some portion of the battlefield is in public ownership and preserved as at Manassas, large sections may remain unprotected and vulnerable to incompatible development. In many cases, decisions about the use of these critical parcels are made in the land-use and community-planning arena. Through their elected officials, local citizens establish the land-use and community planning policies that have the greatest influence over the preservation or loss of historic battle sites.

## **What Does "Preservation" Mean for Battlefields?**

To historic preservation professionals, "preservation" means taking steps necessary to sustain the existing form, integrity, and materials of a historic property. In a broader sense, and as it applies to battlefields, "preservation" may mean protecting the site from damage, harm, or destruction, maintaining it to stave off decay, or reserving it for special uses. Activities that contribute to preservation include resource identification (survey), evaluation, recordation, documentation, curation, acquisition, protection, management, restoration, rehabilitation, stabilization, maintenance, research, interpretation, conservation, education, and training.

Every battlefield is a unique place with its own set of assets and challenges. Options for preservation are different at each site. Preservation advocates have to tailor strategies that balance land and resource protection, private landowner concerns, public access and use. For battlefields already seriously compromised by development, preservation options may be limited, allowing only the acquisition of a small fraction of undisturbed land as a commemorative area. For battlefields in excellent condition, the range of preservation actions is extensive, and will require a broad vision for the best way to protect, maintain, and conserve the battle site.

The plan itself should present the long-range "vision" for the preserved battlefield. Battlefield preservation is a long-term endeavor. Take for instance the history of preservation at Gettysburg, begun by Union veterans shortly after the battle and still incomplete today. However, an effective plan will only guide preservation work in the foreseeable future--perhaps three, five, or ten years. Planners should always identify the time frame in which recommended preservation actions will occur.

## **Why Develop a Battlefield Preservation Plan?**

There are many reasons to develop a battlefield preservation plan, not the least of which is to stake a claim in the public policy decision-making process. In addition, a preservation plan can or should do the following things.

- Galvanize public attention about the need to protect the site and its surroundings.
- Educate and inform the public about this part of the community's heritage and its continuing value.
- Clarify where the battlefield is located and inform property owners who own pieces of it.
- Locate, identify, and document historic features on the battlefield.
- Ensure that actions by the State and local governments enhance preservation of the site and minimize harmful actions.
- Encourage sensitive and compatible development in and around the battlefield.
- Demonstrate that battlefield preservation as part of the community's heritage and physical character contributes to local economic vitality.
- Address issues relating to land use regulation, tourism, interpretation, and design that affect the battlefield.
- Create an agenda for future preservation activities that will have broad support.
- Strengthen political understanding and support for preservation.

## What Is a Battlefield Preservation Plan?

There are many kinds of plans and planning. Plans appropriate for large areas such as battlefields include the following.

**Land protection plans** develop priorities for protecting critical parcels of land and identify protection mechanisms.

**Master plans**, the most general kind of plan, establish an overall management concept for the area.

**Site plans**, often prepared by a landscape architect or civil engineer, lay out the specific placement of buildings (visitors centers, etc.) and roads on a particular site.

**Interpretive plans** suggest how the historic events should be interpreted and identify expertise, materials, facilities needed to accomplish the interpretation.

For the purposes of this guide, a **Battlefield Preservation Plan** defines the overall vision for preserving the battlefield and guides future preservation work, i.e. it provides a specific direction and concrete steps to be taken to reach agreed-upon goals. A battlefield preservation plan may discuss topics found in the other kinds of plans, such as historical themes to be incorporated in the battlefield's interpretive program or critical lands identified as needing protection. However, a preservation plan will not treat these issues in as great a depth as would plans produced solely to address those topics.

Not every battlefield preservation plan will look the same or address the same issues. Preservation plans vary depending on a variety of factors, including:

- the size of the battlefield, how many acres it includes;
- the level of knowledge about the battle and the specific locations where the battle actions occurred, as well as knowledge about the historic resources that represent the battle;
- the extent to which the battlefield has been recognized as an important historic place;
- whether the site, or some portion of it, is substantially protected and whether a management entity exists to "run" the battlefield;
- the kinds of threats facing the battlefield; and
- the broader economic and social context of the communities in which the site is located.

Regardless of what issues face a particular battlefield, a preservation plan is essential in establishing a strategy with specific, prioritized actions to guide preservation efforts and ensure the long-term preservation of the battlefield.

## Involving the Community

The planning process helps communities determine the best ways to preserve a site. Because battlefields are large land areas (the average size of the battlefields studied by the Civil War Sites Advisory Commission is approximately 4,200 acres) with multiple property owners and interest groups, battlefield preservation is inherently a public endeavor. Therefore, informing the public about the preservation project and getting public input and agreement among those involved with the site (including landowners) is critical to the success of the preservation effort.

The plan and its goals should reflect agreements among all parties involved with the site (the management entity, local officials, citizens, property owners, and other interests) as to the reasons for preserving the site and the long-term management objectives for it. Developing goals will be most effective if a public participation process is used. Public participation can take many forms, from large public meetings to survey questionnaires to web sites. The specific vehicle(s) used to communicate with and involve the public in the planning process should be tailored to each community.

### **Elements of a Battlefield Preservation Plan**

Ideally, the plan will articulate the goals for the battlefield site and implementation strategies, including specific tasks, to achieve those goals. The American Battlefield Protection Program recommends that, in general, battlefield preservation plans address the factors listed below. If your organization wants to hire a professional planning consultant to develop the battlefield preservation plan, use the guidance presented here and in the next section, “Tips on Writing a Good Plan,” to develop a scope of work for the consultant and to review the consultant's drafts.

- 1) **The historical significance of the battle and the battlefield.** The plan should briefly discuss the significance of the battlefield without going into a detailed history and analysis of every aspect of the battle. The most critical thing is to state the importance (military and otherwise) of what happened at the site.
- 2) **The location and geographical area of the battlefield.** The plan should describe and map the location and extent of the battlefield. Guidance on defining the boundaries of battlefields is provided in the National Register Bulletin *Guidelines for Identifying, Evaluating, and Registering America's Historic Battlefields* (available online at <http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/bahome.htm>).
- 3) **Cultural and natural resources on and within the battlefield.** Briefly discuss, describe, and map historic resources and natural features within the area of the battlefield. Types of resources include farmhouses, old roads and road traces, earthen fortifications, fence lines, walls, bridges, and archeological remains, as well as natural features such as streams, wetlands, geological formations, wood lots, and wildlife habitat areas. The plan should identify clearly which resources are associated with the battle, which resources may be significant to other periods of history, and which resources may be significant environmental areas. It is important to indicate the level of knowledge about these resources; for example, the plan should indicate whether historic resources have been surveyed and/or evaluated and formally designated on the State or National Register of Historic Places. If planners do not have sufficient information to describe these resources, the plan may recommend conducting surveys to learn more.
- 4) **Current condition of the battlefield.** If not already completed, on-site surveys will be necessary to determine the current condition of the battlefield proper and to identify individual resources within the battlefield. The plan should note whether the battlefield is in generally the same condition it was at the time of the battle, what changes have occurred since the battle, whether cultural or natural resources have been destroyed, and what percentage of the entire battlefield remains today.

- 5) **Brief history of battlefield protection efforts.** Past efforts to protect battlefield land and resources may influence the goals and recommended actions of a contemporary plan. For example, an earlier public land purchase may already protect a portion of the battlefield. Plans should identify earlier initiatives, their level of success, and whether additional action is needed. This discussion relates to several of the factors listed below.
- 6) **Current land use of the battlefield and its immediate surroundings.** The plan should describe current uses of land within the battlefield and surrounding areas. Is the land in agricultural use, if so, what kind of farming is taking place? Is forestry or quarrying present on the site? Do existing or planned residential or commercial uses occur on or near the site? The plan should discuss the extent to which these and other uses may affect the battlefield landscape, features, or viewsheds.
- 7) **Short- and long-term threats.** It is critical for the plan to address threats to the preservation of the battlefield site since, in most cases, methods of dealing with them will become the focus of the plan's recommendations. Threats can be natural or the result of human action. Man-made threats include incompatible development (residential, commercial, or industrial) resulting in a wholesale loss of individual battlefield resources and/or the setting of the battlefield, and unscientific removal of archeological evidence (relic hunting/looting). Among various natural threats are soil erosion, pest infestation, and decay due to the forces of nature. The plan should differentiate between imminent threats and long-term threats.
- 8) **Community characteristics.** The plan should note community characteristics, such as demographic information, economic issues, and the local political climate. This information places battlefield preservation efforts into a larger, "real-life" context. It also helps planners identify ways battlefield preservation can benefit the community and how to market preservation efforts to the community.
- 9) **Planning capabilities and past performance of local governments with jurisdiction over the battlefield.** Since battlefields cover large areas of land, more than one local government may have jurisdiction. The plan should address the land-use planning and regulatory capabilities of all localities within the boundaries of the battlefield. Has the county or town adopted a comprehensive or master plan? Does the locality have a zoning or subdivision ordinance or any other mechanism to regulate development? Is the local government planning office aware of the battlefield, its location, and its significance? If there is no professional planning office and no formal land-use regulation, are there any limitations on how people may develop their land?
- 10) **Priority parcels needing protection.** This is perhaps the most sensitive and yet most important part of the plan, because it identifies the key parcels of land to be protected, i.e. those parcels which, if lost, would make preserving the battlefield landscape impossible. The plan should justify why the parcels selected are the most important ones. Among the criteria that should be used to select the most important parcels are historical significance, viability as an interpretive location for visitors, and manageability (for example, proximity to other parcels already under protection). The emphasis given each of these criteria (and others that may be used) depends on the goals of the individual preservation plan.
- 11) **Analysis of the most effective land protection methods available for protection of**

**the battlefield.** Many tools can be used in preserving battlefield land. They range from acquisition strategies such as outright purchase and purchase of easements or development rights, to regulatory mechanisms such as zoning or historic district designation, to tax incentives such as placing certain parcels in agricultural or forestal districts or assessing the land at its current use value rather than its potential value if developed to a higher density. This section should enumerate all of the tools most likely to be successful in preserving this particular battlefield and the reasons why they apply in this situation.

- 12) **Attitudes of the local community, local elected officials, and battlefield landowners towards battlefield protection.** If the plan and the preservation effort it represents is to have any chance of being implemented, it must have strong local support. The plan should outline the public involvement strategy and document the support to date of all the critical players whose support is essential to the success of the preservation effort.
- 13) **Partnerships, strategies, and actions to protect the battlefield.** The plan's goals, objectives, and recommendations should lay out a logical sequence of actions (**an action plan**) to be taken over the next several years to make preservation a reality. In addition to describing specific tasks, the recommendations should identify the responsible parties in carrying out the recommended tasks.

### **Tips on Writing a Good Plan (or How to Keep Your Plan off the Shelf)**

A battlefield preservation plan must be well written and geared towards its intended audience in order to succeed. The statement that many plans end up on the shelf collecting dust is a cliché but true. How can this be avoided? Anyone writing a plan intended to guide preservation work should consider the following points. As obvious as these may be, many plans ignore them and are never implemented as a result.

- **Develop a vision or main message for your plan and make it exciting.** The best plans are those that lay out an exciting vision for the future that stimulates the reader enough to make him or her want to be a part of it and help make it happen. If your plan is perceived as uninspiring it won't go very far.
- **Know the purpose of your plan and collect data to support that purpose.** Plans can serve a variety of purposes. Decide exactly what you expect your plan to achieve. Do you want specific legislative changes to result, or are you more concerned with educating the community? Once you've decided what role the plan will play, gather information that will help you make your case. Don't waste time and effort collecting information that isn't directly relevant.
- **Know the audience for your plan.** Plans can be written for a variety of audiences -- a particular constituency, a limited technical audience, the political leadership, the public. Once the plan's purpose has been decided, target the appropriate audience.

- **Include a table of contents and executive summary.** This seems pretty basic, but amazingly some plans don't include these important features. People are busy, so organization is important. Provide a condensed version of your goals, findings, and recommendations up front.
- **Highlight your main points.** Again, most people are busy. They will be looking for the "so what" in your plan. Don't make it hard for them to capture the plan's main points by burying major findings recommendations in the text. Put them in large, bold print.
- **Use graphics to summarize findings.** In the Information Age, people are used to getting information through visual displays. Use charts, diagrams, maps, photographs and drawings wherever possible to present information and convey your message.
- **Do not overwhelm the reader and obscure your message with too much data or history.** If you've gone to a lot of trouble to collect information, you may be tempted to include all of it in the plan. Similarly, historians of the battle may want to include a long and detailed history of the battle. Be judicious. Your readers don't want to wade through a great deal of data or history. Include only as much history as necessary to communicate what happened and why it's important. Include more detailed information in an appendix or refer readers to other sources for more information.
- **Data should reinforce your plan's goals and objectives.** Provide data to support the plan's goals and objectives. If the information in your plan doesn't help you to make your case, it shouldn't be there. For example, if you intend to promote battlefield preservation as an economic development strategy that will help the community generate revenues from heritage tourism, provide figures showing how other jurisdictions with battlefield sites are getting these benefits.
- **Limit the goals to those that are key, definable, concrete, and achievable.** Although many plans attempt to be "comprehensive" by including goals on every possible issue, it is unrealistic to expect action to be taken on such a wide range of concerns. Plans that focus on a limited number of definable, concrete issues are more likely to achieve consensus and generate action than those with a laundry list of items to be addressed.

## **Additional Resources**

The following publications provide additional guidance for battlefield preservation planning efforts.

### ***Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation***, National Park Service, Department of the Interior, 1983.

The *Secretary's Standards* provide professional guidance for historic preservation activities, including preservation planning. The standards for planning outline a process that determines when an area should be examined for historic properties, whether an identified property is significant, and how a significant property should be treated. Available online at [http://www.cr.nps.gov/local-law/arch\\_stnds\\_1.htm](http://www.cr.nps.gov/local-law/arch_stnds_1.htm).

***Civil War Heritage Preservation: A Study of Alternatives***, by Elizabeth B. Waters, National Park Service, 1992.

A 98-page report prepared as a background study for the Civil War Sites Advisory Commission (CWSAC), this document discusses various approaches to battlefield preservation including local planning and regulatory techniques. Published in *Technical Volume I* of the CWSAC's *Report on the Nation's Civil War Battlefields*. Copies available from the American Battlefield Protection Program at [hps-info@nps.gov](mailto:hps-info@nps.gov).

***Dollar\$ and Sense of Battlefield Preservation: The Economic Benefits of Protecting Civil War Battlefields***, by Frances H. Kennedy and Douglas R. Porter, Conservation Fund (published by the Preservation Press), 1994.

Billed as a "handbook for community leaders," this publication discusses in lay terms how battlefields can serve as income generators and fiscal assets for communities; it includes a section on the values provided by historic open spaces. Also provided are figures on public agency and visitor expenditures associated with existing Civil War battlefield parks. The National Trust for Historic Preservation sells this publication as a 20-page information booklet. Orders can be made online at <http://www.preservationbooks.org/>.

For further guidance in organizing a battlefield preservation effort and developing a battlefield preservation plan, contact your **State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)**. Established by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, SHPOs administer the national historic preservation program at the state level. The SHPO's responsibilities include conducting surveys to identify historic properties, nominating properties to the National Register of Historic Places, developing a statewide preservation plan, and providing technical assistance to Federal, State, and local agencies and the public. SHPOs also review Federal projects that affect historic properties. For weblinks to each SHPO, go to <http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/shpolist.htm>.

*Based on "Guidance on Developing a Plan," by Stephen Morris, Planner, Interagency Resources Division, National Park Service, 1994. Revised by Tanya M. Gossett, Preservation Planner, American Battlefield Protection Program, National Park Service, 2001.*